DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 227 TM 012 940

AUTHOR	Baenen, Nancy R.; Hopkins, Patricia
TITLE	Secondary Retention Alternative.
INSTITUTION	Austin Independent School District, Tex. Office of Research and Evaluation.
REPORT NO	AISD-88.17
PUB DATE	Mar 89
NOTE	20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Academic Failure; Elementary Secondary Education; Grade 8; Grade 9; Grade Repetition; *High Risk Students; Junior High Schools; Low Achievement; Middle Schools; *Program Evaluation; *Remedial Programs; Secondary School Students; *Student Promotion; *Transitional Programs; Underachievement
IDENTIFIERS	*Academic Incentive Program; Austin Independent School District TX; *Transitional Academic Program

ABSTRACT

Two alternatives to retention in grade for secondary school students were evaluated in Austin (Texas). Both were designed to allow students who are potential retainees (PRs) to receive remediation in one semester. The Transitional Academic Program (TAP) allows PRs to enroll in ninth-grade courses while repeating eighth-grade courses they had failed; focus is on skills not mastered the first time. The Academic Incentive Program (AIP) is a program of intense remediation in basic subject areas for PRs in junior high and middle schools. The AIP, compared to the TAP, is for students whose attainment is farther below grade levels. Outcome measures evaluated include: students' attitudes; promotion rates; attendance; achievement; academic credits and grades; and dropout rates. PRs were compared to those retained in grade 8. The TAP served 148, 127, 144, and 75 students in the fall 1986 through spring 1988 semesters; the AIP served 28, 104, and 310 students in the fall 1986 through fall 1987 semesters. There were 160 retainees in the 1986-87 school year. AIP students and full-year retainees did better than did TAP participants. AIP students did better in dropout rates and grade point average (GPA), and retainees did better in dropout rate, GPA, and number of failing grades. TAP students earned slightly more credits toward graduation. Contrary to expectations, full-year retainees had lower dropout rates and better academic progress than did students in either transitional program. Staying in the same school may help performance; TAP students attended three schools in three semesters. Moving to high school at the start of a year may also be better than moving after one semester. Thirteen data tables and two bar graphs support the text. (SLD)

ED306227

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Nancy R. Baenen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SECONDARY RETENTION ALTERNATIVE-- AUSTIN ISD

Nancy R. Baenen
Patricia Hopkins

Austin Independent School District
Office of Research and Evaluation

Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco, March, 1989
AERA Session #10.03

Publication No. 88.17

TM012940

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION--POLICY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE 1

STRUCTURE OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS 2

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS 3

PROGRAM EFFECTS 5
- Student Attitudes 5
- Promotion 5
- Attendance 6
- Achievement Gains (ITBS) 7
- Credits and Grades 8
- Robbins vs. High Schools 10
- Dropouts 11

SUMMARY 13

IMPLICATIONS 13

BIBLIOGRAPHY 16

Secondary Retention Alternative--
Austin Independent School District

INTRODUCTION--POLICY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

The educational reform movement did affect the grade placement policy in Texas. The new policy reflects attention to the following somewhat conflicting desires, beliefs, and research findings:

- The desire for stricter standards for promotion,
- The belief that retention will allow students to attain deficit skills better than promotion with remediation,
- The research finding that retention is not beneficial for many students in terms of long-term achievement,
- The research finding that students older than average for their grade tend to drop out more often than those on grade level.

The policy sets much stricter promotion standards, especially at the junior high level. To be promoted, junior high students must:

- Attain an overall average of 70 or above in all courses;
- Attain an average of 70 or above in three of these four subjects--language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science;
- Have no more than five unexcused absences per semester.

However, the law also allows placement of students in the next grade if an alternative program is provided. In addition, it places limits on the number of times a student can be retained (e.g., once across grades five through eight except in unusual situations with parent approval).

Rates at the junior high level in AISD more than tripled (from 285 to 1,066) the first year these new tighter standards went into effect (1986-87). The dramatic increase in retention rates, the knowledge that retention might increase the likelihood that these students may drop out later, and the necessity of providing an alternative to those who had previously failed a grade from five through eight, led secondary education to design two programs as alternatives to retention. Both were designed to allow students to receive remediation in one semester rather than repeat a full year. The belief was that allowing students to move more quickly towards graduation would reduce the possibility of their dropping out.

STRUCTURE OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

The Transitional Academic Program (TAP) is a one-semester program for retainees and potential retainees, with priority given to retained eighth graders. Students are allowed to enroll in ninth grade (high school) courses which repeating eighth grade courses failed. Students are allowed to take up to three of the four major academic subjects required for promotion from grade 8. Skills failed the first time are the primary focus the second time the course is taken. Course grades for the second attempt at the course are averaged with the previous grades to determine whether the student has passed each course. If the student meets promotion requirements, they then go on to their home high school. The program began during the 1986-87 school year at two alternative secondary school settings which included grades 7-12. Students are generally not as far behind as those in the AIP program.

The Academic Incentive Program (AIP) is also a one-semester program for retainees and potential retainees in junior highs and middle schools. Most participants were to be retained in seventh grade but instead were placed into grade 8 in the AIP program. Students are generally far below grade level in their attainments. Intense remediation in basic subject areas is provided for six periods a day, with students taking one elective the other period. Nearly all students have been served at home schools (unlike TAP). The program was available at four schools in 1986-87 and all middle school/junior highs in 1987-88.

From the beginning, the Texas Education Agency, as well as AISD and others, have been very interested in the success of the alternative programs. Austin ISD's Office of Research and Evaluation was asked to evaluate them. Because resources available for the evaluation were quite limited, a priority was set on Transitional Academic Program (TAP) students in 1986-87 and 1987-88 and on student characteristics and outcome measures. Comparison data was collected for most variables on the Academic Incentive Program (AIP) and on full-year eighth grade retainees. Outcome measures investigated included student attitudes, promotion rates, attendance rates, achievement, academic credits and grades, and dropout rates. All students eligible for TAP and AIP are invited to participate. Participation is voluntary. Students who opt not to be involved repeat all of the eighth grade. Ninth grade courses are not available at junior high campuses.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The basic characteristics of TAP, AIP, and full-year retainees are shown in the figures that follow.

Figure 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF TAP AND AIP STUDENTS AND RETAINEES COMPARED

Group	n	Sex		Ethnicity			Median Age	Low Income
		M	F	H	B	O		
TAP Fall, 86	148	64%	36%	42%	34%	24%	16.7	44%
TAP Spring, 87	127	55%	45%	51%	26%	23%	16.2	50%
TAP Fall, 87	144	60%	40%	42%	27%	31%	15.8	52%
TAP Spring, 88	75	63%	37%	43%	33%	24%	15.5	56%
AIP Fall, 86	28	64%	36%	82%	14%	4%	17.0	71%
AIP Spring, 87	104	64%	37%	53%	22%	25%	15.9	51%
AIP Fall, 87	310	65%	35%	58%	22%	20%	15.6	57%
Retainees, 86-87	160	62%	38%	43%	27%	31%	16.6	33%

Ethnicity of TAP students parallels that of full-year retainees (42.5% of whom were Hispanic, 26.9% Black, and 30.6% Anglo/Other). AIP students were more likely to be Hispanic (58%, for instance, in fall, 1987). This compares to ethnicity for all students in AISD in fall, 1987, of 31.9% Hispanic, 20.1% Black, and 48% Other. Minority students, then, represented about three fourths of those in TAP, AIP, and conventionally retained, compared to 52% of all students in the District.

Figure 2. ETHNICITY OF TAP STUDENTS

ETHNICITY	Fall 1986		Spring 1987		Fall 1987		Spring 1988	
	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)
Black	50	(34)	33	(26)	39	(27)	25	(33)
Hispanic	62	(42)	65	(51)	60	(42)	32	(43)
Other	36	(24)	29	(23)	45	(31)	18	(24)
TOTAL	148	(100)	127	(100)	144	(100)	75	(100)

Sex of TAP students has averaged about three-fifths male and two-fifths female for the two years of TAP's existence. This is comparable to the male/female ratio for full-year retainees and for AIP students.

Figure 3. SEX OF TAP STUDENTS

SEX	Fall, 1986 %	Spring, 1987 %	Fall, 1988 %	Spring, Total %	N	%
Female	36	45	40	37	196	40
Male	64	55	60	63	298	60
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	494	100

In terms of age, ninth graders would normally be expected to be 14-15 years old. The actual range for TAP students was 13-18 years old (see Figure 1). The median age of AIP students varied from 17.0 to 15.6 years of age, close to the range for TAP students. The median age of TAP students has declined from the inception of the program (and compares to the median age of 16.6 for full-year retainees):

- 16.7 in fall, 1986;
- 16.2 in spring, 1987;
- 15.8 in fall, 1987; and
- 15.5 in spring, 1988.

In addition, TAP in spring, 1988 served a large number of students (60%) who were seventh graders at the end of the 1986-87 school year. Most of these students were placed into eighth grade in the Academic Incentive Program in fall, 1987 and then entered TAP in the spring. At least three students, however, were completing seventh grade requirements while in the TAP program in spring, 1988.

In terms of income, 44-56% of those participating each semester in TAP were considered low income (based on eligibility for free or reduced lunch programs), compared to 33% for full-year retainees and 51-71% for AIP students. The percentage of TAP students from low-income families has increased each semester:

- 44% of TAP students in fall, 1986;
- 50% in spring, 1987;
- 52% in fall, 1987; and
- 56% of TAP students in spring, 1988.

In all, the TAP program has been drifting towards serving students who are younger and who have lower incomes than the earlier students. Incomes for students in TAP and AIP are also somewhat lower than those for students who opt for full-year retention.

PROGRAM EFFECTS

More data was collected on TAP than the AIP or full-year retainee groups. Results for other groups are shown as available.

Student Attitudes

Surveys were sent in November, 1987, to over a hundred students in the TAP program at all three campuses.

Most of the students were positive about their experience in TAP, as reflected in their agreement with the following statements:

- "I feel more confident about staying in school through graduation now that I am in TAP." (71%)
- "My attendance is better than last year now that I am in TAP." (63%)
- "I feel better prepared to pass classes at my home high school next semester." (58%)
- "Compared to last year, the TAP teachers and counselors in this school help me learn more." The percentage of those who agreed or strongly agreed was 71% at Robbins, 82% at Rice High School, and 79% at Rice Middle School.
- "Compared to last year, the TAP teachers and counselors in this school pay more attention to me as a person." (72%)
- "TAP has helped me improve my grades in subjects I failed before." (95%)

A majority (59%) of the TAP participants agreed that the eighth grade classes being repeated were easy. Asked if they wanted to stay another semester in their TAP school, the students at Robbins were 62% in favor of it. To the question of whether they were worried about going on to their home high schools, 43% at Robbins admitted to being worried, as did a third of the Rice High School students and 20% at Rice Middle School.

Promotion

Based on data supplied by the schools, the promotion or placement rate for TAP in fall, 1987, was 94%. Comparing only those listed on the rosters, the fall, 1987, success rate is higher than that for fall, 1986 (which was 90%). This is despite the fact that students enrolled this year had to repeat more eighth-grade classes on the average.

Figure 4. 1986-87 AND 1987-88 TAP SUCCESSES

	Total Enrolled	Promoted (%)	Retained	Left TAP	Unknown
Fall, 1986	148*	133 (89.9%)	1	13	1
Fall, 1987	144	136 (94.4%)	4	4	-

*Based on rosters. Fifteen students reported as returning to schools before rosters were compiled are not included.

Figure 5. FALL, 1987, TAP SUCCESSES BY CAMPUS

	Total Enrolled	Promoted (%)	Retained (%)	Left TAP (%)
Rice M. S.	46	46 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rice H. S.	39	33 (84.6%)	2 (5.1%)	4 (10.3%)
Robbins	59	57 (96.6%)	2 (3.4%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	144	136 (94.4%)	4 (2.8%)	4 (2.8%)

The promotion rate for the spring, 1988, semester was 71%. Students who left TAP before semester's end (6 students or 8% of those enrolled) included four withdrawals, one transfer outside the District, and one student who returned to her junior high school, according to school reports.

Figure 6. SPRING, 1988, TAP SUCCESSES BY CAMPUS

	Total Enrolled	Promoted (%)	Retained (%)	Left TAP (%)
Rice M. S.	13	11 (84.6%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0%)
Rice H. S.	14	6 (42.9%)	6 (7.1%)	2 (14.3%)
Robbins	48	36 (75.0%)	8 (16.7%)	4 (8.3%)
TOTAL	75	53 (70.7%)	16 (21.3%)	6 (8.0%)

Attendance

Absence rates were checked for students in TAP in the fall of 1986 and 1987 for the semesters preceding, during, and after program participation. Figure 7 shows the overall pattern for both groups.

Figure 7. ABSENCE RATES BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER TAP

Group	n	Before	n	During	n	After
Fall, 1986*	124	12.0%	127	11.6%	127	20.5%
Fall, 1987+	140	13.1%	144	12.8%	144	12.8%

*For those who were promoted. +For all in TAP.

As this figure illustrates:

- Absence rates before and during participation in TAP were similar for both groups (averaging 12-13%).
- The pattern of fall, 1987, students once they left TAP looks more positive than last year's. Absence rates last year rose for TAP participants once they left the program; this year the rate remained the same.
- Of last year's TAP students attending Robbins, those who remained at Robbins the next semester did not show as steep an increase in absence rates once they left the program as did those who went on to high school.

Achievement Gains (ITBS)

Two special administrations of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) were given to TAP students enrolled in fall, 1987. By comparing the pretest scores from October with the posttest scores from January, 1988, achievement gains for students in the TAP program can be measured. Of the 144 students enrolled in TAP in the fall, 101 students had scores for most parts of the pre- and posttest.

Based on national norms, the expected growth between the pretest and the posttest would be three months. Actual grade equivalents (GE's) obtained by these students are shown in Figure 8. Overall, students gained over three GE months in mathematics and vocabulary but not in reading comprehension. Posttest scores (except for Anglo/Other in vocabulary) remained below the national average of 8.8 for eighth grade The percentage of students making any gains between pre- and posttests was:

- 61.3% in Vocabulary.
- 58.8% in Reading Comprehension.
- 61.9% in Mathematics.

Figure 8. MEAN GRADE EQUIVALENT GAINS FOR THE ITBS FOR TAP STUDENTS, FALL, 1987

Group	N	Pre-Voc	Post-Voc	GAIN	N	Pre-Read	Post-Read	GAIN	N	Pre-Math	Post-Math	GAIN
All	93	7.9	8.2	+.3	98	7.2	7.4	+.2	97	7.4	7.8	+.4
Male	58	8.1	8.4	+.3	60	7.1	7.4	+.3	59	7.5	8.0	+.5
Female	35	7.5	7.8	+.3	38	7.3	7.4	+.1	38	7.1	7.5	+.4
Black	29	7.0	7.4	+.4	29	6.5	6.6	+.1	29	7.1	7.4	+.3
Hispanic	40	7.8	8.0	+.2	41	7.4	7.6	+.2	40	7.5	7.8	+.3
Other	24	9.1	9.4	+.3	28	7.5	7.9	+.4	28	7.3	8.1	+.8

Note 1: Pretest given in October; posttest in January.
Note 2: Voc=Vocabulary; Read=Reading Comprehension; Math=Mathematics.

Credits and Grades

Grades earned for TAP students were compared to those for students participating in the Academic Incentive Program (AIP) and to those for students repeating eighth grade for a full year. AIP was used as a comparison because it was another alternative to retention in use in AISD. Students who failed grade 8 and were retained for the full year in 1986-87 were used for comparison because TAP was considered an alternative to traditional retention.

The mean grade point averages (GPA) for 1986-87 TAP students in the semesters following their participation in the TAP program were less than passing. The averages obtained by junior high students in AIP, however, and by full-year retainees, who did not participate in either TAP or AIP, were passing.

Figure 9. HIGH SCHOOL GRADE POINT AVERAGES (GPA) FOR TAP STUDENTS AND AIP STUDENTS AFTER PARTICIPATION AND FOR FULL-YEAR RETAINEES

Program & Date	n	GPA in Spring, 87	n	GPA in Fall, 87
TAP Fall, 86	115	66.33	89	68.38
TAP Spring, 87	---	---	91	68.13
AIP Fall, 86	23	67.49	23	72.04
AIP Spring, 87	---	---	79	70.34
Retainees, 86-87	---	---	94	75.33

As can be seen from Figure 10, average credits earned per semester were higher in fall, 1987, for full-year retainees. Overall, however, first semester TAP students gained more credits for graduation than did the retainees.

Figure 10. MEAN HIGH SCHOOL CREDITS EARNED BY TAP STUDENTS AFTER PARTICIPATION AND BY FULL-YEAR RETAINEES

Group	n	Credits in Spring, 87	n	Credits in Fall, 87	Total Credits
TAP Fall, 86	125	1.2	92	1.2	2.4
TAP Spring, 87	---	---	91	1.3	1.3
Retainees, 86-87	---	---	78	1.7	1.7

Note: Minimum course load per semester is 2.5.

The difference between the average number of classes failed for students who had been in TAP or AIP and those who were full-year retainees is marked: 2.2 - 2.7 classes were on the average failed by TAP or AIP students in the semesters following their being in the alternative programs, while retainees did much better, with an average number of failed classes of 1.4. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 11. AVERAGE NUMBER OF CLASSES FAILED FOR TAP AND AIP STUDENTS AND FULL-YEAR RETAINEES

Program & Date	n	Average # of Classes Failed Spring, 87	n	Average # of Classes Failed Fall, 87
TAP Fall, 86	126	2.6	93	2.7
TAP Spring, 87	---	---	92	2.6
AIP Fall, 86	23	2.7	23	2.2
AIP Spring, 87	---	---	80	2.3
Retainees, 86-87	---	---	99	1.4

The most noticeable difference between TAP and AIP students and regular retainees was in the percentage of students passing all their classes. Almost 50% of the retainees passed all their classes in fall, 1987, but only a little better than 20% of TAP students did, and AIP students' success rate varied from 26% to 30% (Figure 12).

Full-year retainees, then, showed the best academic progress based on grade point average, percentage of students passing all classes, and number of classes failed.

Figure 12. PERCENT PASSING ALL CLASSES FOR TAP AND AIP STUDENTS AND FULL-YEAR RETAINEES

Program & Date	n	% Passing All Classes Spring, 87	n	% Passing All Classes Fall, 87
TAP Fall, 86	126	26.2	93	23.7
TAP Spring, 87	---	----	92	21.7
AIP Fall, 86	23	21.7	23	30.4
AIP Spring, 87	---	----	80	26.3
Retainees, 86-87	---	----	99	49.5

Robbins vs. High Schools

TAP students were usually required to change campuses twice--once to attend the TAP program at a transitional school, and then, if successful there, to go on to their "home" or regularly assigned high schools. What difference, if any, did it make for those students who stayed on at Robbins (one of AISD's alternative secondary schools, including grades 7-12) after their semester in the TAP program? Did having a continuous year at the same school affect their attendance or grades?

Figure 13. COMPARISON OF FALL, 1986, TAP STUDENTS AT ROBBINS PROMOTED TO OTHER HIGH SCHOOLS WITH THOSE PROMOTED AND STAYING AT ROBBINS

Status	Absence Rate	Average GPA	Average # of Classes Failed	% of Students Passing All Classes
Left Robbins	15.4%	66.85	1.7	49.3%
Stayed at Robbins	15.3%	75.83	0.6	77.8%

Of the students at Robbins in fall, 1986, who were promoted, 36 (35%) stayed at Robbins in the following spring semester. (The other 67 TAP students from the fall semester who were promoted attended various other high schools in the spring.) Figure 13 shows that by fall, 1987, those who stayed at Robbins:

- Had about the same attendance rate, but
- Had higher GPA's, lower failure rates, and a higher percentage passing all their classes than those who went on to other schools.

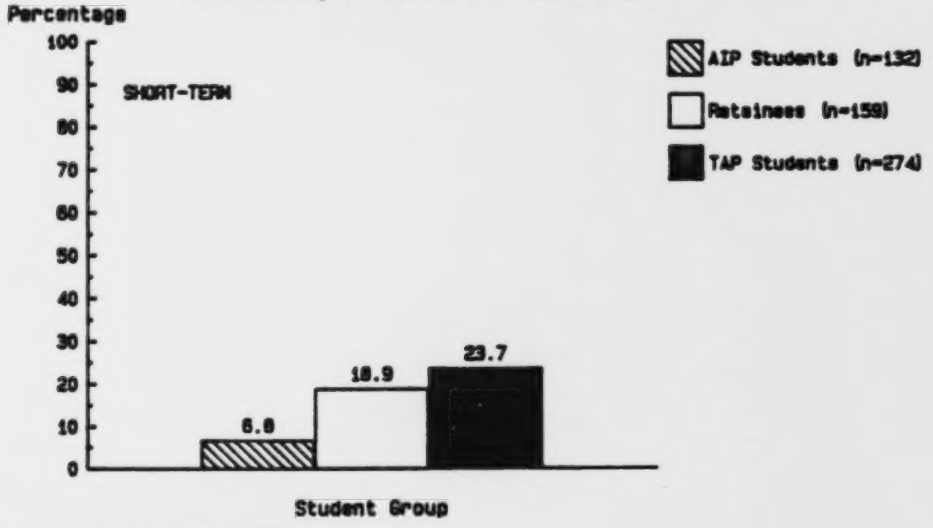
Thus, staying at the same school all year appears to have been beneficial for these TAP students.

Dropouts

Overall, the dropout rate for TAP students, either short- or long-term, was much higher than for AIP participants and greater than for full-year retainees who did not participate in either the TAP or AIP programs.
As shown in Figure 14, the lowest short-term dropout rates, (as of October, 1987), were for AIP participants and all junior high students (including TAP and AIP participants). TAP short-term dropout rates were higher than for full-year retainees, AIP students, and all groups in junior high.

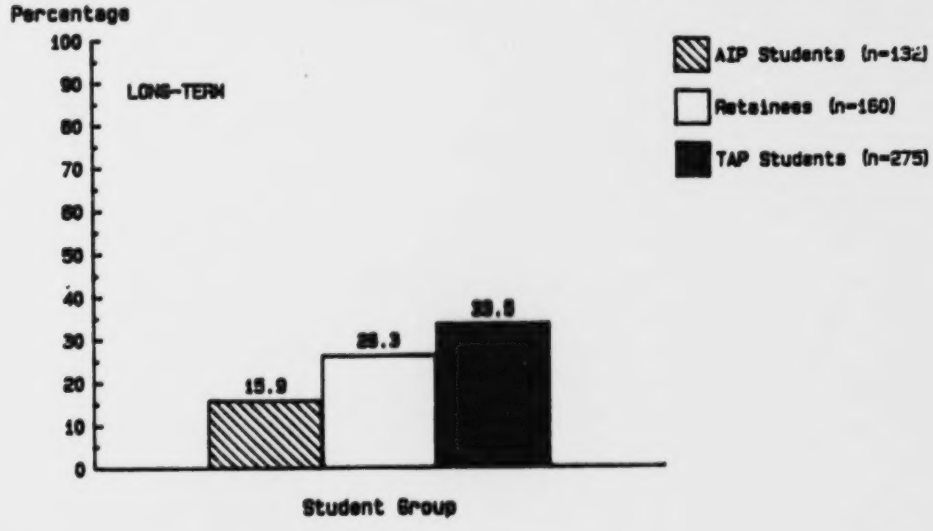
The long-term dropout rates for TAP, AIP and full-year retained students show the same pattern. As of March, 1988, one third of the TAP participants had dropped out. Dropout rates for full-year retainees (26%) and AIP students (16%) were lower.

Figure 14. SHORT-TERM DROPOUT RATES FOR 1986-87 AIP STUDENTS, ALL JR. HIGH STUDENTS, RETAINEES, AND TAP STUDENTS



Note: Dropout rate as of 10/87.
Dropout rate for all jr. high/middle school students was 9.6%.

Figure 15. LONG-TERM DROPOUT RATES FOR 1986-87 AIP STUDENTS, RETAINEES, AND TAP STUDENTS



Note: Dropout rate as of 3/88.

SUMMARY

Both those in the Academic Incentive Program (AIP) and full-year retainees from 1986-87 appear to have fared much better than TAP participants--AIP students in terms of their dropout rates and grade point averages, and full-year retainees in their dropout rates, GPA's, and number of F's. TAP students do, however, earn slightly more credits towards graduation than full-year retainees (with two semesters to earn the credits rather than one). The only known difference between those who repeated a full year and those who went into TAP is that TAP students are somewhat more likely to be low income.

IMPLICATIONS

AISD and other districts are just exploring options for these students. It is to AISD's credit that we are willing to move in new directions when the need is evident. It should be recognized that, as with nearly all retention-related research, comparison groups are used rather than randomly assigned control groups. Differences in the populations in the various programs may impact results in unknown ways. Still, results are suggestive and may seem surprising. Possible changes and refinements in AISD's approaches came to mind as we worked through the data; readers are invited to form their own opinions and ideas on solutions. Consider the following remarks as "mind teasers" to prompt discussion on this complex dilemma.

Contrary to our expectations, full-year retainees actually showed lower dropout rates and better academic progress than students in either the TAP or AIP transitional programs. Dropout rates and grade point averages favor AIP over TAP students, although other variables do not. AIP students' dropout rates are lower than the AISD average; TAP and retained students continue to drop out at rates exceeding the District average. One in three of the TAP students had dropped out by March of the year following participation. It is too early to abandon the transitional programs, but modifications should be considered to make them more effective long-term.

Why would full-year retainees and AIP students show better patterns of growth? Full-year retainees are somewhat less likely to be low income, which could mean a stronger value for education in the home. However, factors related to program differences also seem likely contributors. One important factor, for example, may be that retainees and AIP students change campuses less frequently than TAP students for the most part. Successful TAP students often are

enrolled in three campuses across three semesters--a home junior high/middle school, the secondary TAP School, and a home high school. Most AIP and retained students, on the other hand, stay at their home middle school/junior high for the program and the semester following. The school changes necessitated by TAP may be simply too much for the students, who are already experiencing difficulty in school. One national study using a similar delivery model (with students pulled from home campuses for a year and then returned) also found high dropout rates (Vito, 1988).

Moving on to a high school midyear may be more difficult than in the fall, once other ninth graders have started adjusting and making friends. Some support for this view comes from the School Community Guidance Center (SCGC) evaluation; students who returned to a home school midyear after participation in SCGC had lower attendance than those moving on the following fall (ORE Pub. No. 87.53).

Another factor may be the nature of the students and school environments involved. Some national research suggests high-risk students do not cope well with change, have limited life-coping skills, and have a low sense of personal responsibility (O'Sullivan, 1988). Students who repeat a full year at grade 8 are not faced with the same challenges and pace that AIP and TAP students are. Students surveyed reported liking the teachers and program at Rice and Robbins. However, the regular high schools to which they move are much larger in population and physical plant. While high schools do provide former TAP students with some support (e.g., school tours, orientation sessions, courses scheduled with other TAP students, and counseling), it appears to be insufficient to compensate for differences in the school environments. The following changes were suggested at the end of the 1987-88 school year.

- Changing the location or length of TAP. Moving TAP to home high schools would reduce the number of school moves necessary with TAP. Students appropriate for Robbins all through secondary school might still be placed there. Alternatively, TAP students might stay at one location for the full year.

- Stronger support at the high school level. Classes focusing on life-coping skills (as have been proposed in courses like WIN), mentors, counselor or teacher sponsors, or support groups may all help. Increasing the personal touch and creating stronger links to school are consistent with dropout prevention efforts.

- Training. If TAP is moved, training and written guidelines for school staff should be provided on eligibility, course grades, and promotion for these students at a minimum. Confusion on TAP eligibility and grade level assignments was evident this year.

The AIP program might also be strengthened through more follow-up and support for students once they leave the program. A greater percentage of AIP students might also be considered for an alternative school setting like Robbins. More of these students may need the self-paced program provided there.

In 1988-89, secondary education has acted on some of these ideas. They have changed the delivery format for TAP. Some high schools now offer the program (eliminating the need for a one-semester placement at a secondary school), while others still transfer to secondary schools and then on to a home high school. It will be enlightening to compare results for those served in the two settings.

Obviously, determining how to best meet the needs of these high-risk students is complex. Identifying the problem is easier than solving it. The key appears to be what happens to students within alternative approaches as well as thereafter. Long-term support is probably needed to prevent dropping out.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baenen, N. (1988). New directions: Alternatives to retention, 1987-88 final technical report (ORE Pub. No. 87.25). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Baenen, N. (1988). Retention rates: 1980-81 through 1987-88 (ORE Pub. No. 87.23). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Butler, D. and McColskey, W. (1984). Chapter 2 - Discretionary, 1983-84 (ORE Pub. No. 83.10). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Districtwide surveys: 1987-88 final technical report (1988) (ORE Pub. No. 87.49). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Frazer, L. H. (1988). An alternative for high-risk students: School Community Guidance Center evaluation, 1987-88 (ORE Pub. No. 87.53). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Frazer, L. H. (1987). Launching toward success: The School Community Guidance Center [and] the Transitional Academic Program evaluation, 1986-87 (ORE Pub. No. 86.44). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

O'Sullivan, R. (1988). Evaluation of a decision-making program to improve school success with high-risk middle school students. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. Greensboro, NC: University of North Carolina.

Sailor, P. (1987). 1986-87 dropout report. 1986-87 annual performance report (DMI Pub. No. 87.M01). Austin Independent School District, Department of Management Information, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Schuyler, N. and Turner, B. (1987). Retention or promotion--Have policies passed or failed? (ORE Pub. No. 86.31). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Slavin, R. E. (1987). A theory of school and classroom organization. Educational Psychologist, 22 (2), 89-108.

Vito, R. C. (1988). A longitudinal study of at-risk high school students: Identification, treatment, and follow-up. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester.